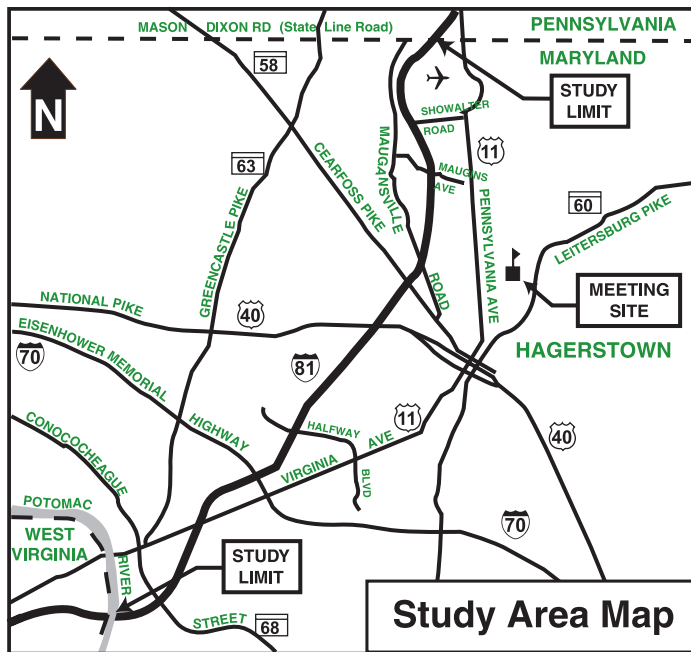


# I-81 Improvement Project

PROJECT NEWSLETTER

SPRING 2004



## GREETINGS TO ALL

The Maryland State Highway Administration (SHA) would like to update you on the I-81 Improvement Project. Since the project was last presented to the public at an Alternates Public Workshop in June, 2002, the study team was directed to study toll options along I-81. This newsletter contains information on the alternates that will be carried into the next stage of development.

## YOU ARE INVITED

### Informational Public Workshop

**Wednesday, May 26, 2004  
North Hagerstown High School  
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue  
Hagerstown, MD  
5 pm - 8 pm**

SHA will be conducting an Informational Public Workshop for the I-81 Improvement Study at the location shown above. This workshop will be

co-sponsored by SHA and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) in conjunction with Washington County. The workshop will allow each attendee to conduct a self-paced review of important project information. Attendees will have the opportunity to visit project displays. Please note that there will be no formal presentation; however, SHA and county representatives will be available to receive comments and answer questions. All interested persons are invited to attend and participate in this workshop and express their views regarding proposed alternates. Brochures describing the proposed alternates and forms for written comments will be made available at the Informational Public Workshop.

## PROJECT OVERVIEW

The purpose of this project is to improve traffic operations and safety along the Maryland portion of I-81 from the West Virginia state line to the Pennsylvania state line.

Traffic conditions along this segment of I-81 have deteriorated over time. Deficiencies in interchange ramp configurations and lengths of merge lanes, as well as increasing truck traffic, have created operational problems. These issues have contributed to a number of accidents along the highway. Between 1998 and 2000, there were 276 accidents along mainline I-81. Of these accidents, the rates for fatal accidents and truck related accidents were significantly higher than the statewide rates for similar types of highways.

### Alternates Public Workshop

SHA held an Alternates Public Workshop at the Western Heights Middle School on June 20, 2002. The purpose of the workshop was to acquaint the public with the study, to present the findings of the conceptual engineering and preliminary environmental studies and to provide a forum for public comment on the overall project planning process and alternates presented. Approximately 100 people, including local residents, community leaders, elected officials and county representatives, attended the workshop. Comments received ranged from concerns regarding residential displacements and noise impacts to the increase in truck traffic along I-81.

Since the Alternates Public Workshop, the study team has continued to develop alternates in more detail. In addition, toll options are now being considered to finance the improvements and a truck weigh station is also being investigated. These options are discussed in the next section.

## ALTERNATES RETAINED FOR DETAILED STUDY

With the help of the public and environmental agencies, SHA identified the Alternates Retained for Detailed Study, or ARDS. SHA is refining these alternates and will evaluate their effects on the environment.

### Alternate 1 – No-Build

This alternate includes routine maintenance and safety improvements. No major improvements would be made under this alternate.

### Alternate 2 – Interchange Improvements

This alternate would improve the interchanges and portions of the mainline roadway. The mainline roadway would remain four lanes; however, merge lanes would be lengthened and shoulders would be widened to address safety concerns.

### Alternate 2A– Interchange Improvements w/ Collector-Distributor Roads

Under this alternate, the interchange improvements for Alternate 2 would be combined with a 2-Lane collector-distributor (C-D) roadway from I-70 to Halfway Boulevard.

(See Figure 1.)

### Alternate 3 – Inside Widening

This alternate consists of adding a lane to the existing I-81 corridor on the inside towards the median. In addition, interchange improvements proposed as part of Alternate 2 would be included.

### Alternate 3A – Inside Widening w/ Collector-Distributor Roads

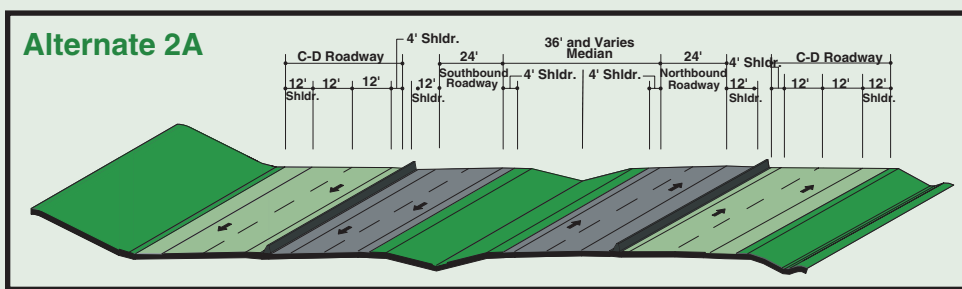
This alternate consists of improvements shown for Alternate 3, as well as the construction of a 2-lane C-D roadway extending from Halfway Boulevard to I 70.

### Alternate 3A Modified – Inside Widening w/ Collector-Distributor Roads

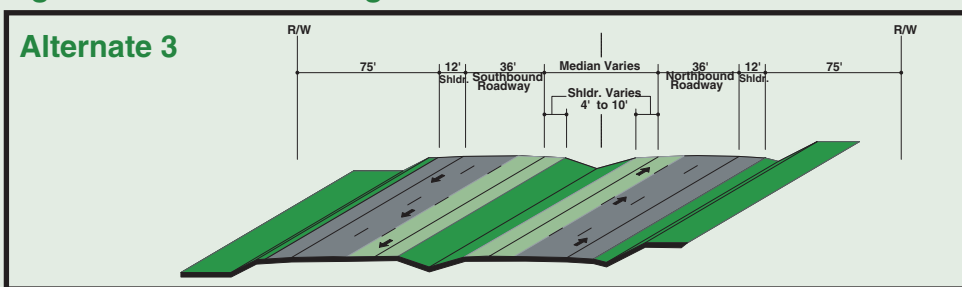
This alternate includes the same improvements shown for Alternate 3A. However, between the I-70 and Halfway Boulevard interchanges, I-81 would remain 2 lanes in each direction.

### Figure 1 - Interchange Improvements w/ C-D Roads

The typical section shown represents the collector-distributor road which extends from south of I-70 to north of Halfway Boulevard.

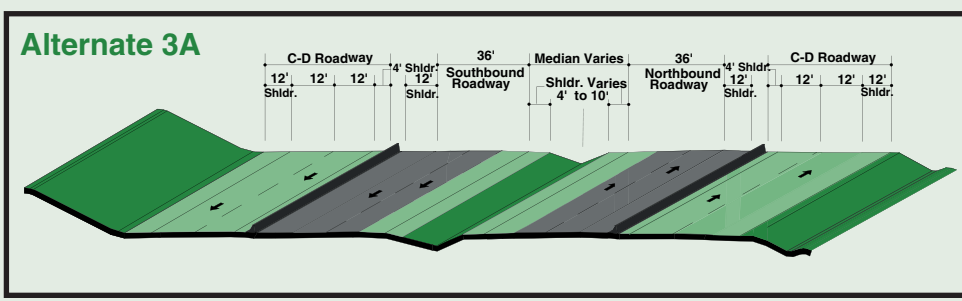


### Figure 2 - Inside Widening



### Figure 3 - Inside Widening w/ C-D Roads

The typical section shown represents the collector-distributor road which extends from south of I-70 to north of Halfway Boulevard.



## **Toll Options**

Due to the state's current fiscal constraints, consideration is being given to utilizing toll financing for the proposed improvements. Toll plazas are proposed at the north and south ends of I-81 in Maryland. Tolling would allow the improvements to be constructed in a shorter time frame, while minimizing costs to the local residents.

Options for toll facilities along I-81 have now been included in the study. One of the following toll options may be chosen in conjunction with any of the build alternates. Further evaluation will determine which combination is the most reasonable.

### **Option 1**

With this option tolls are proposed for both directions of I-81 between the Potomac River and Conococheague Street. Through the toll plazas, both high speed and cash toll lanes would be provided in each direction along the mainline. Under this option, drivers would pay tolls as they enter and exit Maryland near the West Virginia state line.

### **Option 2**

This option proposes to toll southbound I-81 between Showalter Road and State Line Road and along northbound I-81 between the Potomac River and Conococheague Street. Both high speed and cash toll lanes would be provided on I-81 through both toll areas, and only those drivers entering the state would pay tolls.

### **Option 3**

This option proposes to toll northbound I-81 between Showalter Road and State Line Road and along southbound I-81 between the Potomac River and Conococheague Street. Both high speed and cash toll lanes would be provided on I-81 through both toll areas, and only those drivers exiting the state would pay tolls.

### **Option 4**

This option proposes tolling both directions of I-81 between the Showalter Road and State Line Road, and between the Potomac River and Conococheague Street. Through the toll areas, both high speed and cash toll lanes would be provided in each direction along the mainline to accommodate the high traffic volumes. Under this option, drivers would pay tolls as they enter and exit Maryland near the West Virginia and Pennsylvania state line.

## **Truck Weigh Station**

The 12-mile segment of I-81 in Maryland, and the 26-mile segment of I-81 in West Virginia do not have any permanent sites for conducting commercial vehicle enforcement activities. The two states in conjunction with the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration, and FHWA are exploring alternatives for a cooperative enforcement facility that have the potential for significant improvements in truck safety.

A truck weigh station would be constructed on a 10 acre site along the southbound side of I-81 between Halfway Boulevard and US 40.



## **ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSES**

In conjunction with the engineering studies, detailed environmental analyses are underway on the ARDS to identify the extent of the impacts to socio-economic, cultural, and natural resources within the study area, as well as the assessment of air quality and noise impacts.

The Chesapeake and Ohio (C&O) Canal National Historical Park, located in the southern portion of the project area, is owned and operated by the National Park Service. It is the only public park identified along I-81. The C&O Canal and Trail run adjacent to the Potomac River from Washington D.C. to Cumberland, Maryland.

SHA, in consultation with the Maryland Historical Trust and other consulting parties, has identified two historic resources in the study area that are listed on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) or eligible for the NRHP – the C&O Canal National Historical Park and the Garden of Eden. Both sites are located at the south end of the I-81 corridor near the Potomac River and the MD 68 (Conococheague Street) interchange.

## NEXT STEPS

The following steps are required to complete the Project Planning Process:

- Hold Location Design Public Hearing  
Fall 2004
- Evaluate public and agency comments  
Winter 2004/2005
- Recommend an alternate to the SHA Administrator  
Spring 2005
- Complete the Final Environmental Documentation  
Fall 2005
- Obtain Location and Design approvals  
Fall 2005

## CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have any questions about SHA's study efforts, please contact SHA's Project Manager Nicole Washington at (410) 545-8570 or (800) 548-5026 or email her at [nwashington@sha.state.md.us](mailto:nwashington@sha.state.md.us).

Information on this and other SHA projects can be obtained at our website: [www.marylandroads.com](http://www.marylandroads.com)



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